Conference Focuses on Grace

Under the theme, “Good Works in Grace Spurred in Love,” nearly 120 Lutheran camp professionals and board members attended the annual Lutheran Outdoor Ministries (LOM) Conference in November. The event was held at the T Bar M Retreat Center in New Braunfels, Texas.

This year’s theme looked at how everything we have and everything we are is because of God’s love for us. This love empowers us – it spurs us on in good works to a life of service for others. Small group discussions occurred as part of the keynote presentations.

Keynote speakers included Peggy Hahn, executive director of LEAD, a nonprofit organization focused on resourcing and coaching church leaders who want to make adaptive changes; Steve Baskin, co-director of Camp Champions in Texas and a partner in Everwood Day Camp in Massachusetts and Camp Pinnacle in North Carolina; and Jake Sorenson, founder and director of Sacred Playgrounds, a ministry offering research and training to camps and congregations.

The bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s Southwestern Texas Synod, Rev. Susan J. Briner, was in attendance at opening worship. Worship leadership was provided by Rev. Heather Hansen and Rev. Ashley Dellagiacoma.
Second Leadership Award Presented at Conference

As part of a fairly new recognition program, the Manlove-Howells Leadership Award was presented at the 2018 LOM Conference. It was given to Dick Sayther, one of the founding partners of Gronlund Sayther Brunkow (GSB), a development and board consulting firm. A video was shown, with testimonials of those who have worked with Sayther over the years.

Also speaking in person about Sayther was Keith Johnson, former Executive Director of Novus Way (NC). Johnson referred to Hebrews 11 which lists many saints who have gone before us. “We stand on their shoulders,” Johnson said. “Dick—we also stand on your shoulders.”

Anthony Briggs, Executive Director of Cross Roads (NJ), also gave testimony to the work of Sayther. Briggs has worked with Sayther at several outdoor ministry sites in his career. “I hear your voice frequently when I’m feeling a little desperate. Thank you for taking the time and going above and beyond what consultants do by walking with our organizations,” Briggs said.

In accepting the award, Sayther talked about his years as a camp director and consultant. He said that the health of congregations was a reflection of the health of camps. Often, it was said that camps were an extension of congregational ministries. He feels today, there may be a different approach. “It used to be that we talked about camp as an extension of the congregation. Now we might say that congregation is an extension of camp,” Sayther said.

In his nomination letter, Paul Hill wrote, “The untold story of Lutheran camping, since the mid-70’s, is the contribution made by Dick Sayther to help camps develop long range plans, boards, raise millions of dollars, and coach executives. Dick has the heart of a faithful churchman. He came out of camping having led Sugar Creek in the early 70’s. And he saw a need for increased skills and professional development throughout Lutheran camping. His mentor, Dr. Bob Gronlund, helped him translate all he had successfully done at Sugar Creek into a thriving consulting business that has touched all of us in Lutheran camping. Dick’s insights, now taught by all of GSB, have proven over and again how a successful outdoor ministry ought to plan, design, organize, structure the board, operate as executives, and develop full spectrum fundraising.”

Hill added, “He taught me everything there is to know to develop an annual fund, lead an organization, train and equip our board, and ultimately run a highly successful, million-dollar campaign. I owe my professional career to him. And he coached me in an honest, often humorous, direct way. He has great lines he uses such as: ‘Your lack of planning is not my emergency,’ and ‘The floggings will continue until morale improves.’”
LOM presented the 2018 Innovative Program Award at the recognition ceremony on Thursday night of the LOM Conference. The winner this year, the seventh time the award was presented, was Outlaw Ranch (SD)’s Connecting Cultures at Camp program. Connecting Cultures at Camp brings together English and Spanish-speaking families for a week of intentional community in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Families from Pueblo de Dios, a congregation based in Sioux Falls, and a mix of other families are welcomed into a week of prayers, worship, and camp activities experienced in both languages. With the effort and excitement of bilingual-focused counseling staff, musicians, and resource leaders, this family camp is one expression of our varied and vibrant Lutheran faith. This was Outlaw Ranch’s fourth summer partnering with Pueblo de Dios, and they have seen this program develop from a budding community into an authentic exchange and appreciation of what we all bring to the table.

The idea for the program began when Director Matt Rusch was visiting with Pueblo’s pastor at the time, Jeanette Clark, who was at Outlaw Ranch for Youth Camp. At the time, it was identified that while youth campers attended a Lutherans Outdoors camp, there was not something set up for families to attend camp together. In partnership with Pueblo de Dios, this program was born.

The foundation of this program is the Spanish-speaking counselors. They shine during the week as they translate and ensure that everyone is on the same page. The camp is blessed to have a staff that includes both international and domestic speakers who lead the way toward inclusion with their ideas and consistency. Without these staff, camp would have still happened but with many missed opportunities to make adjustments and deconstruct language barriers.

In their application form, the camp indicated that “Our hope for this program is to continue facilitating communication and relationships between families across South Dakota and beyond. When we spend time listening and learning from one another, we build relationships that strengthen the Lutheran Church and give new life to outdoor ministry. When we remember that we belong to one another, we glimpse the Kingdom of God.”
First Diversity Grant Awarded

LOM presented the first Diversity Grant at the recognition ceremony on Thursday night of the LOM Conference. The winner this year was Lake Wapogasset Lutheran Bible Camp’s Burmese refugee program.

Wilderness Canoe Base (WCB) has begun a new partnership with the Karen Organization of Minnesota (KOM) – an organization working specifically with Burmese refugees across Minnesota. Their goal is to begin a new program that will invite youth associated with the KOM to participate in a WCB trip. While interest is incredibly high from the youth, there is skepticism – specifically when it comes to the financial commitment – about whether this is a worthwhile investment.

With the grant, the camp will be able to off-set the prices for this group and help the leaders to know that WCB and the broader LOM Network is committed to creating a space for youth from KOM. With that, they would anticipate a deeper partnership and a new opportunity to bring even more youth from KOM up to experience WCB in future years. The Diversity Grant of $2,000 was made possible with the funds coming from “ELCA Outdoor Ministries Endowment Fund.”

Auction Raises $40K

Ten percent and a match go to Puerto Rico

LOM held an auction on Wednesday night of the annual conference. Items donated by LOM organizations raised $40,493.61, of which $20,000 is part of the LOM operating budget for 2018 and the balance to be allocated by the LOM Board.

Father and son duo, Paul and Jake Hanson, served as auctioneers. A gift of $8,000 will go to Camp Eduardo Roig in Puerto Rico to help them with hurricane relief. The LOM board voted to tithe auction proceeds beginning this year and Sharon and Jack Wineman, friends of Carol Joy Holling Camp in Nebraska and now living in Arizona, challenged LOM to raise $40,000 and they would match the $4,000 tithe.

The auction has become a highlight of the conference and continues to raise needed funds.
2018 Leadership Training Event Recap
By Gretchen Bachman, LTE Chair

They say that everything is bigger in Texas. When it comes to LTE attendance, I think we would have to agree! 29 participants and 8 faculty gathered at T Bar M for a full and educational four days on all things program. Many of our participants had one or two summers of full-time experience, which led to some great questions and conversation during each session. On one of the nicest days we had, we learned that creation stewardship is NOT AN OPTION as we were introduced to some easy yet educational games and activities outside. We were challenged by the "why" of what we do, whether it is Risk Management, Marketing, Staff Recruiting and Training, Hospitality, or Worship. Our diversity session invited us into sacred liminal space where we can learn from and understand those who may initially appear different than us. And when our brains were too full to take in any more, we spent the evenings in fellowship - and a little competition - during the ever-popular Bunco as well as a night of Texas Trivia. I think we can safely say a good time was had by all.

A big thank you to Rev. Louise Johnson and Rev. Jay Alanis for being our guest faculty for this event, to Cross Trails Ministry for providing shuttle service to and from the airport, and to Lutherhill Ministries for providing worship and fellowship resources.

Mark your calendars now for November 5-10, 2019, and join us for the LTE-Administrative Track at Lake Junaluska, NC.

Thanks to our Sponsors
A big thank you to our major sponsors of this year’s conference.

Mission Investment Fund
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Seminaries of the
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
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As part of our annual recognitions at the conference, those with significant anniversaries in outdoor ministries are recognized. Four of our own were given walking sticks, in honor of 30 years in the network. Pictured here are those honored: Penny Christensen, Bob Kuehner, Dave Jarvis, and Jeff Bluhm. Also honored were two people who retired this year from active service: Keith Johnson and Dave Eliason.

A 5K run was held on Thursday during the conference. With a new twist, it was a team event where each runner needed to have a partner. Also, new this year, a whiffle ball tournament was held. As previously reported, Don Johnson missed the tournament. No winners of either were announced but it sure looks like the runners had a good time!

Thursday night culminated in an outdoor Texas barbecue, complete with live Texas musicians. Most of the musicians were Lutherans and performed while participants ate an authentic Lonestar State meal.

Curtis Bradbury was the winner of the Apple Watch at the conference. He successfully visited all the Ministry and Business Partner Exhibitors and won the raffle for the main prize, donated by Tic-Tac-Toe Marketing.
Words from Don

The 2018 LOM Annual Conference is now history. It was a great week. Our community for the week included 127 participants and 18 exhibitors, speakers, and workshop leaders. More than 30 participants were at the LOM conference for the first time and I’m pretty sure most of them will be back again. The staffs from our LOM outdoor ministry sites in Texas were spectacular hosts and we were so fortunate to be the beneficiaries of their expert event planning skills. T Bar M Conference Center has set a very high bar for us in regard to quality of lodging, meals, meeting spaces, and outdoor gathering spots. The keynote speakers sure gave us much to think about and many good ideas – thank you Peggy Hahn of LEAD, Steve Baskin of national renown, and LOM Board Member Jake Sorenson of Sacred Playgrounds. There were great workshops! And big shouts of gratitude to our LOM events coordinator, Randy Youngquist-Thurow, for another magnificent event. Personally, my only regret is that I somehow missed the whiffle ball championship game!

For those of us who are part of the LOM network, especially those of us who have often been LOM Conference participants, it’s easy to take for granted just how awesome the LOM Annual Conference is. So, it’s sometimes good to get feedback from an objective set of eyes and ears of those who aren’t regularly part of LOM events. Jeremy Landers is the executive director of Slumber Falls Camp in New Braunfels (same town as the T Bar M), and he took the opportunity to participate in our conference as it was so close by. Slumber Falls is a ministry of the South Central Conference, United Church of Christ (UCC). The counterpart to LOM in the UCC is Outdoor Ministry Association of UCC (OMA-UCC). Their executive director is Bill Bourdon, and Bill passed along to me this email that he received from Jeremy:

“Thank you so much for reaching out to me in regards to attending the LOM Annual Meeting. I was not sure what to expect beyond some of the keynoter names, but the event was extremely helpful, and everyone that I met was open to share ideas and make me feel welcome. I pulled a lot of practical information, ideas, and suggestions that I am already implementing at Slumber Falls Camp. I cannot tell you how grateful I am to you and the OMA board for thinking of me and providing me with this opportunity. It was a great event, and came at a needed time in my ministry. Thank you again.”

Thank you, Jeremy, for sharing this time with us. And thank you, LOM leaders, for your awesome ministries and your commitment to strong and vibrant outdoor ministry everywhere throughout Christ’s church.

Update on California outdoor ministry sites:
As many of us are aware, Glen Egertson, co-executive director of Lutheran Retreats, Camps and Conferences (CA) – El Camino Pines and Luther Glen, left the LOM Conference as soon as he received the news about the shooting that took place in Thousand Oaks. Because of the proximity of California Lutheran University (CLU) and the close ties of El Camino Pines and CLU, there were many in the El Camino Pines community who were impacted by that horrific event. In talking with Lauri Egertson, the other co-executive director of LRCC, I’ve been assured that both the camp and the university communities are grateful for the prayers from all their colleagues throughout LOM. And this is a reminder to all of us to review our Active Shooter Plan. Check it with your insurance company, local law enforcement officials and make appropriate revisions. Then make sure that your staff are familiar with the plan and that it is being implemented.

LOM Board of Directors: The board met on the Friday following the conference. Among their deliberations:
• SERVICE: The board acknowledged the service of outgoing members Meggan Manlove, Deanna Christensen, and Lindsey Scheid. They affirmed new members (beginning January 1): Dianna Parks, Kathryn Schaefer, and
Meredith Massey Beall. The board gave gratitude for the service of Casey Fuerst as board president for the past two years, as she wanted to step down as president for her last board year.

**NEW BOARD:** Election of officers for the ensuing year: Darryl Thompson Powell, president; Casey Fuerst, vice-president: Jake Sorenson, Secretary; and Susan Troutman, treasurer. Members of the Board, beginning January 1, 2019 – Darryl Thompson Powell, President; Casey Fuerst, Vice-President; Jake Sorenson, Secretary; Susan Troutman, Treasurer; Dianna Parks, Meredith Massey Beall, Kathryn Schaefer, Dave Herder, Branden Hunt, Rod Boriack, Mark Burkhardt, and Hannah Anderson.

**COMMITTEES:** Because of changes in current and anticipated ongoing operational practices, the Board voted to disband the following committees: Technology and Communications, Marketing, Membership, and Finance. The board affirmed the reconstitution of the Multicultural Awareness Committee to be now known as the Diversity Committee. The board appointed liaisons to committees moving forward: Development – Dave Herder and Meredith Massey Beall; Curriculum – Rod Boriack; Recognitions – Hannah Anderson; Education – Dianna Parks; Nominating – Kathryn Schaefer; Diversity – Branden Hunt. The board appointed Casey, Darryl and Branden to bring forward updates to the LOM PPI Manual.

**FINANCES:** As part of the treasurer’s report, the board reaffirmed the current policy covering the cost of board members not employed by an LOM member organization to participate in the LOM Conference. The consensus of opinion was that this is an effective way for board members to get better acquainted with issues that LOM organizations are dealing with. As part of the executive director’s report, there was extensive discussion regarding how his travel expenses for consultation with LOM organizations, board retreats, etc. are recouped. There was no decision made to change the current practice of asking such organizations to consider executive director travel expenses when making their annual LOM contribution.

**NEXT YEAR AND BEYOND:** As part of a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats), there was considerable discussion looking ahead to time during the 2019 Great Gathering dedicated to activities exclusively for LOM. The board voted to restrict $5,000 of the proceeds from the 2018 Auction to help underwrite the cost of providing buses from Lake Junaluska to Asheville and/or Lutheridge to culminate in a banquet, awards ceremony, and auction, all at Lutheridge. The board declared that 2019 will be a year of celebration throughout LOM in observance of the 100th Anniversary of the establishment of outdoor ministry in the ELCA and its predecessor bodies. The board directed the executive director to form a task group to make plans for this celebration. The board also declared that the theme for 2020 will be one of welcome and inclusion for all people in order to be a springboard for the future, following the objectives of the current strategic plan and reflected in educational initiatives and other events of LOM. The board conducted a thorough review of progress with the current Strategic Plan for LOM and began making plans for the development of the next Strategic Plan.

**YOUTH MINISTRY NETWORK:** There was extended discussion in response to the motion approved at the LOM Business Meeting during the conference: “For the LOM Board to reach out to the ELCA Youth Ministry Network to explore the possibility of the LOM Annual Conference occurring with the 2021 Extravaganza Event.” Upon conclusion of discussion in this regard, this motion was voted in the affirmative: “That the board authorize the LOM Executive Director to reach out to Todd Buegler (executive director of the ELCA Youth Ministry Network) in ways to investigate deep collaboration in response to the motion made at the annual conference.”

**EVALUATION:** In Executive Session, the board prepared its annual performance review for the director.

**RESEARCH:** Jake Sorenson made a report on the results of the Outdoor Ministry Connection (OMC) oversample for the major research project of the American Camp Association (ACA).

**CURRICULUM:** The board postponed further discussion of fees and expenses for the LOM Curriculum until its January meeting so that it could do so with final financial results for curriculum development during the complete year of 2018.

**THANK YOUS:** Finally, the board worked together to prepare thank you notes to all who contributed items and made purchases and donations at the auction.

--Don Johnson, Executive Director
Resources from Conference Available

Presentations and resources from our conference presenters are available on the conference app. We have information there from Susan Troutman, Steve Baskin, Jake Sorenson and Peggy Hahn. Simply go and find the presenter’s description at http://app.lomnetwork.org/workshops/.

Reminder: Outdoor Ministry Survey from Jake Sorenson

In 2014, we had 332 camps respond. In 2016, we had 311 camps. This year, we’re hoping for over 400. These data will be ready for the Great Gathering in 2019. Take the survey here: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/OMCamps2018.

Seminarian Looking for Summer Camp Job

An M.Div student at United Lutheran Seminary (Gettysburg Campus), class of 2021, is interested in exploring the possibility of working at an LOM camp this summer. This seminarian has no restrictions regarding geographical location of the camp. If you are interested in getting contact information in order to connect with this student, contact Don Johnson, director@lomnetwork.org.

How To Keep the Right People On Your Bus

Nonprofit consultant Joan Garry breaks down evaluations of our teams and offers keen insights into how to raise the bar of performance for staff, board, and volunteers. Similarly to the pattern Garry observes in the education sector, many camp/retreat ministry leaders are promoted from successful program roles into management/executive positions for which we may not have training and expertise. Fortunately, we can bring our creativity and teachable spirits to the challenge and learn to facilitate healthy organizations. Read more here: https://www.joangarry.com/right-people/

Enjoy the organizational wisdom of Joan Garry? She'll be one of the keynoters at RelationSHIFT, the Great Gathering of outdoor ministry leaders next fall at Lake Junaluska! Other keynoters include author/activist Shane Claiborne and clergy/teacher/author Barbara Brown Taylor. The event will bring together outdoor ministry folks from the mainline Christian denominations to build relationships, share best practices, and equip vital ministries to meet the emerging needs of God’s people. You can learn more at www.omcgreatgathering.org or on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/omcgreatgathering.

LOM News will not be published in early January due to the Christmas Holiday. The next edition, our Annual Report, will be published in early February.

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year
From the LOM Board and Staff
In Conclusion

Parting Thoughts
from the LOM Webmaster/Communications Coordinator

Grounded Leadership

Last time, we looked at defining leadership. Hopefully you have a good, strong definition of leadership and a sense of what leadership is all about. And, maybe you have been able to identify gifts that you (or others) have that would help them as they lead. One of the things that I think is important, especially in a leadership position in the church, is that good leaders must be grounded. I liken it to fishing. While I have not had many experiences in that vein, I do remember going fishing with my grandfather when I was a child. We would take the fishing line, put a lead sinker on the end of the line, and then cast the line. The lead sinker would take the line directly down to the focal point - the bottom of the pond. The purpose of the lead at the end of the fishing line is to position that bait where we want it to be, specifically where we think the fish might be.

Christian leaders also need to position themselves on their focal point. They need to be focused on Christ. As Christian leaders, we want other people to see that Christ is our anchor. I think of the story of Jesus and Peter from Matthew 14, verse 22-33. Peter walked on the water and kept his eyes focused on Jesus. When he did that, he was able to achieve his task of walking across the water. But, when he allowed his attention to be focused on his surroundings, and he looked at the storm, the waves, and the seat, he lost his power and strength and began to sink. To be strong leaders, we need to keep our eyes on Christ, be anchored in Jesus, and look for the presence of the Holy Spirit guiding us.

To be rooted in Jesus and the Gospel, it is important for us to know what we truly believe and how those beliefs guide our vision for the future for our churches or organizations. We might ask the question, “What is God’s mission for us?” That will make us look at our mission from God’s perspective, not from our own. To determine that answer, you might look at your own passions and philosophies. What do you get excited about? Where do you sense eagerness and energy in your context? As you look at that, you might begin to see what is behind what you do. What are some of your guiding beliefs and principles?

I think it’s important that leaders should be able to articulate what they believe and how their philosophy in life drives what they do. If you haven’t thought about your beliefs and philosophy for awhile, now might be the time to do to that. You can start by asking yourself questions like, “What do you believe?” “What would you say if you wrote your own creed?” “What are some of the guiding principles that drive your work?”

–Chad Hershberger

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